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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 010178

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,  
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN  
USAID/ANE/MEA  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, December 27,  
focuses on reports about the earthquake and resulting  
tsunami that caused deaths and destruction throughout

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Asia. Other stories highlight domestic issues as well  
as reports about the Palestinian elections.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "The secrets of the buried Arab development report"

Columnist Bader Wardam writes on the op-ed page of  
center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour  
(12/27): "Thirty Arab researchers and intellectuals,  
who wrote the third annual Arab human development  
report for 2004 - which was stopped through American  
blackmail, are currently meeting in Beirut to discuss  
the possibility of publishing the report through an  
organization independent of the United Nations. No  
doubt, stopping the publication of the report  
constitutes a huge scandal for the United States. The  
report editor, Nader Farjani had scored big and  
destroyed completely all of the false claims made by  
the U.S. administration with regard to reform in the  
Arab world when he took his case to the international  
media and exposed the American conspiracy.. This  
American conduct stirred a great deal of resentment  
among commentators and intellectuals in the west,  
including Thomas Friedman.. But for the genuine free  
and liberal Arab intellectuals, who have not sold  
themselves to the Pentagon, this issue marks the  
beginning of a successful intellectual battle against  
both the United States and backwardness in the Arab  
world for the first time ever in a clear manner and  
without fear of being accused of treason."

-- "The required Syrian scapegoat"

Columnist Haidar Rashid writes on the op-ed page of  
independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm  
(12/27): "There has to be a scapegoat to carry the  
blame for the security collapse in Iraq. After, the  
battle in Fallujah and the exhaustion of Zarqawi and  
his group of foreign terrorists as the scapegoats in  
Iraq, there is an urgent need to find a new scapegoat  
on which to pin all these defeats. Prior to the  
American invasion and occupation, the honor fell to  
international terrorists and chemical weapons. After  
that came the fighters from outside Iraq, Zarqawi and  
others. Now, as some pro-American Iraqis are saying,  
there are attempts to involve Syria and its  
intelligence services in what is going on in Iraq..  
Syria has no interest in being directly involved in  
what is going on in Iraq, despite the fact that its  
interests do not coincide with the presence of the  
American forces and the continuation of the  
occupation. A direct involvement on its part,  
however, would make it a target and would increase  
America's motivation to attack it.. A new scapegoat  
is required in order to explain the Iraqi-American  
failure of imposing security and taming the Iraqi  
people. The need for such a scapegoat increases as  
the elections draw near. Yet, this issue is one thing  
and choosing Syria as the new scapegoat is another.  
Events on the ground suggest that such a choice will  
not be acceptable and the Americanized people in Iraq  
must begin looking for another scapegoat."

-- "The disciplinary London conference"

Lamis Andoni writes on the op-ed page of independent  
Arabic daily Al-Ghad (12/27): "Do not misunderstand:  
America and Israel are refusing to take part in the  
London conference next month, but they do support the  
meeting itself if its purpose is to 'rehabilitate the  
Palestinian Authority'. In other words, now that the  
leader Yaser Arafat, the 'major obstacle in the path

to peace', is gone, Washington and Tel Aviv are seeking to snip the wings of the Palestinian regime as a precondition for resuming negotiations.. It is known that America and Israel had pressured London to cancel the conference if the imprisoned Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti did not withdraw his nomination for the presidential elections. Democratizing the Palestinian regime would start with the nomination of the acceptable candidate, namely Mahmoud Abbas, whose stances, I'm sure, would not be respected if he did not succumb to Israeli and American demands. No wonder then that Washington and Tel Aviv would support the London conference with specific definitions and tasks that would guarantee Abbas' abidance by positions and policies that otherwise would not go through if it was left up to the Palestinian people. Halting the Intifada and placing the security apparatus under a unified leadership is not designed to put an end to security violations but to stop them from taking part in resisting the Israeli occupation. In this context, the London conference aims to `tame the Palestinian regime'."

HALE